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SCHAKOWSKY WARNS SECRETARY OF ENERGY RICHARDSON THAT ILLINOIS WILL FACE NATURAL GAS CRISIS DURING WINTER

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today warned that Illinois and other states are facing another energy crisis as a result of high natural gas prices. Schakowsky raised her concerns directly with Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson during a meeting of the Democratic Energy Working Group. Fifty-five percent of American homes are heated by natural gas.

"In Chicago and the Midwest, we are facing a natural gas crisis. Over the past year, natural gas prices have more than doubled. Consumers are paying this high price because energy providers are only concerned about maximizing their profits and Republicans in Congress are reluctant to address the problem," Schakowsky said.

"I have been assured by the Secretary of Energy that the Administration is considering all options so that families in Chicago and across the country will not be left out in the cold this winter. Big oil gouged my constituents and millions of consumers at the gas pump this summer. I am here to warn them that I will turn up the heat if they try it again this winter," Schakowsky added.

In a letter to House and Senate appropriators, Schakowsky urged them to increase funding for the Energy Information Administration. She wrote, "As the U.S. enters its heating season, Congress, other policymakers, private industry and the public need improved information in order to ensure that markets work as efficiently as possible." The letter was cosigned by Representatives John Tierney (D-MA), Marty Meehan (D-MA), and Jim Greenwood (R-PA).

Schakowsky is also working with her colleagues to urge the President to take steps to address the crisis. In a letter, they called on the President, to use his authority to release crude oil from SPR, urge OPEC to increase production, and release \$400 million in emergency Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). In addition, she signed another letter to Senate and House appropriators urging more funding for energy assistance programs.

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Finally, Schakowsky, who is a member of the Government Reform Committee, said that she is looking forward to the two-day hearings starting tomorrow that will focus on practices by the oil and gas corporations and Administration policies affecting energy issues for the upcoming winter. She will also use the opportunity to discuss with Administration officials, private industry representatives and her colleagues the need to devote more resources to help families and businesses purchase energy efficient appliances, invest in renewable fuels, and increase home weatherization efforts.